

**SCHOOL BOOKS FOR UGANDA**

*A Project Proposal by*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year in the province of Nova Scotia, hundreds of school textbooks are discarded and replaced with more recent editions. Many of these books are in good condition and contain relevant and up-to-date information; however, schools often don't have the space to store them or the funds to ship them elsewhere. And although some of these books are sent to the Nova Scotia School Book Bureau to be exchanged amongst schools throughout the province, the bureau only handles recent editions. The more dated editions, which may be less than a decade old in some cases, are either recycled or sent to a landfill.

We live in a world where intellectual and financial poverty are widespread and great disparity exists between, and within, many of the developed and developing nations. In light of this, it seems a grave injustice that in a western nation such as Canada, so many educational resources are merely discarded when they could be of great use to students and teachers in developing countries.

Aside from their importance as valuable learning tools in the formal education system, books are also significant in that the knowledge and information contained in them may contribute to the development of human capital, which can be defined as "capital which is embodied less in land, factories and buildings and more in human beings, their knowledge and skills".<sup>1</sup> This has come to be seen by some development theorists as a catalyst for empowerment on both a personal and an economic level.

These are among the reasons why I hope to send a number of high school textbooks, which will otherwise be disposed of, to Uganda, East Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Allen and Thomas, eds. *Poverty and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

## PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

In March of 2003, I learned of a number of books being held at Sir John A. MacDonald High School in Timberlea, Nova Scotia. The books had recently been replaced by newer editions and were about to be discarded due to lack of storage space at the school.

In May of 2003, I spent a month in the town of Mbarara in southern Uganda as part of my university programme. During my time there, I visited several schools and met a number of the students, teachers, and directors. Each school had a unique and interesting story behind it. Esther<sup>2</sup>, who runs a private school near Mbarara, fled Uganda with her three children in the early 1980s, during Amin's presidency and the resulting civil war. She spent 15 years living in Canada before returning to Uganda in order to pursue her dream of opening a school. She began five years ago with four students, and she has 65 at present. She hopes to expand her facilities to accommodate more children.

Peter, another Ugandan fellow whom I met, is the director of a school in a rural area outside Mbarara that can only be reached with a 4x4 vehicle during the dry season. He constructed the classrooms and dormitories himself and opened the school to students only two years ago. His goal is to provide an accessible facility for children and teenagers who live in the surrounding hills and would otherwise not be able to attend school. He currently has more than 600 students, some of whom are also boarders there. Over 200 of his students are AIDS orphans whom Peter provides for himself. On the day that I went to Peter's school, the students who had homes and families to return to had been sent back. The price of grain and other food products had apparently risen dramatically

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<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

during the previous week, so Peter had to ration the reserves amongst his dependents.

In each school I visited, the need for both finances and resources was expressed, particularly the need for books. I immediately thought of the textbooks at Sir John A. MacDonald and vowed to look into the matter further upon my return to Canada.

Although the information contained in Canadian schoolbooks may not be as appropriate or as relevant to the Ugandan education system as Ugandan books would be, it is my belief that having somewhat less useful books is still better than having none at all. At any rate, even if only a number of the books are found to be relevant or interesting to the students, they will be of more use than if they were disposed of here in Canada.

While the first seven years of primary education are provided free-of-charge by the Ugandan government, many secondary schools are private, very expensive, and inaccessible to those who live in rural areas. In a study conducted by the UN in 2000, it was found that

people living in and around Kampala, the capital, and other urban centres have much easier access to secondary education than those in the countryside. Only 6% of children of the poorest 25% of families complete secondary education, compared with 22% from the richest 25%.<sup>3</sup>

Those who are economically disadvantaged and live in rural areas therefore face the greatest barriers to attending school and are the least likely to receive a formal secondary education; not only is it often impossible to attend school due to the location of their homes, it is also unaffordable. For a school such as Peter's that aims to provide for the rural poor, books are a precious commodity and may be very scarce. While books from Canada may not be the most appropriate, they are arguably better than nothing.

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<sup>3</sup>Kirungi, Fred. "Uganda Tackling School Bottlenecks." *Africa Recovery* vol 14.2 (2000): 20.

## THE PROJECT PLAN

My proposed project entails shipping approximately 30 cardboard boxes of school textbooks to Kampala, the capital of Uganda. They will then be picked up and distributed amongst several schools in rural areas in the southern region of the country.

The preliminary stages of the project have already taken place. With the help of two of my fellow students, the books have been sorted, arranged by subject, and repacked. As the school could not store them during the summer months, myself and two volunteers used a pick-up truck to move the books from the high school to the home of my cousin, a teacher at the school, who agreed to store the books in her basement until they can be picked up by the shipping company. Thanks to the help of friends and family, the costs for labour and transportation have thus far been minimal.

I have received shipping quotes from several companies that operate from the Halifax area. The most time-efficient and economical choice seems to be Schenker of Canada, which has a Halifax branch. One reason for this choice is that Schenker is one of the few companies I've contacted that do LCL shipping, or 'Less than a Container Load'. To send a 20' container costs more than \$2000 USD, but the price for LCL is significantly less.

As soon as I have obtained the necessary funding and made the full payment for the cost of shipping, Schenker will pick the books up from their current location, my cousin's home in Upper Tantallon. The closest place to Halifax from which LCL shipments are sent is Montreal, so the books will therefore have to be transported there by truck. They will then be shipped to Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania, and trucked to

the Schenker terminal in Kampala, Uganda.

Once they arrive in Kampala, my contact in Uganda will collect them and transport them to the town of Mbarara, which is approximately a four-hour drive to the south. The budget includes an approximate cost for the truck rental, fuel, and any other expenses incurred during the transport of the books in Uganda.

After trucking the books to Mbarara, my associate in Uganda has agreed to distribute them accordingly. He is an American fellow who volunteers with a group of Ugandan nurses with whom I spent three weeks during my time in Uganda. He and the nurses will undertake the task of temporarily storing the books and distributing them amongst several schools in the area that have expressed an interest and are in need of them. Some of the books will be collected from the location where they will be stored in the town of Mbarara, while others will have to be transported to schools in rural areas.

The timeline and budget for the project are as follows:

*Timeline*

June 15-21, 2003	obtainment of shipping quotes, establishment of contacts and associates in Uganda
June 22-30, 2003	sorting and packing of books, removal of books from the high school to a different location
July 1-31, 2003	fundraising and public awareness concerning the project
August 1-15, 2003	collection of books by the shipping company, transferal to Montreal, QC, departure of ship destined for Uganda
October 21-31, 2003	arrival of books in Kampala (based on a 72-day estimate for transit time given by Schenker Halifax), transport of the books from Kampala to Mbarara
November 1-21, 2003	collection and distribution of the books

*Budget*<sup>4</sup>

	USD	CAD
Telephone calls to Uganda (100 mins @ \$1.39 CAD/min)	\$103.72	\$139.00
Transport fee for moving books from their current location to the Schenker loading dock in Halifax	\$150.00	\$201.24
Transport fee for trucking books from Halifax, NS to Montreal, QC (1800 lbs @ \$10.45 USD/cwt)	\$188.00	\$252.36
Transport fee including shipping to Dar es Salaam and ground transport to the Schenker terminal Kampala (\$397.00 USD/cbm or 1000 kgs)	\$794.00	\$1065.23
Fuel surcharge for transport (2.05% of transport fee)	\$16.28	\$21.84
Bill of lading	\$12.50	\$16.77
Handling fee	\$150.00	\$201.24
Funds allotted for vehicle rental, fuel and other costs in Uganda	\$100.00	\$134.16
Total sum of estimated costs	\$1514.50	\$2031.84

Aside from the actual planning and implementation of the project, there are other important factors which must be taken into consideration, such as the sustainability of the project and the degree to which it is gender inclusive.

With regard to the latter, the schoolbooks cover a variety of subjects that may be interesting and useful to students of both sexes. All books were evaluated, based on their content and appropriateness, by myself, two of my peers, a teacher, and a professor.

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<sup>4</sup> As the original quote was given in USD, all prices have been converted to CAD according to interbank rates provided on July 4, 2003 by the FX Currency Converter ([www.oanda.com/convert/classic](http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic)).

We did not include those books that were outdated, that degraded or demeaned women in any way, or that re-enforced typical gender stereotypes. For example, we found a number of books from the early 1970s that undermined the importance of women's roles in traditional tribal societies in Africa and Tasmania. Another set of books on the subject of woodworking directly addressed men and showed pictures of women in aprons who were cooking and sewing in their newly-renovated kitchens. It was the opinion of myself and my counterparts that some students, and women in particular, may find such images to be insulting, misleading, or misrepresentative of their own lives and those of women in western nations.

A further issue regarding gender is female accessibility to education. According to recent statistics, females account for 47% of total enrollment at the primary level, but only 32% at the secondary level.<sup>5</sup> Measures are beginning taken, however, to encourage girls to complete their secondary education. Initiated in June of 2000, the National Strategy for Girls' Education in Uganda is assisting schools in implementing programmes that are designed specifically for girls, teaching them about communication skills, contraceptive use, and self-esteem.

Providing that the project to send books to Uganda is successful, I would like to see it become increasingly participatory and more widespread. It is my belief that the sustainability of a project ultimately depends on those who are meant to benefit from it. I would like to eventually have a website designed where schools could post listings of books that are no longer in use. Schools in rural areas could then access the website and choose the books they wish to obtain. Shipping companies would be able to review the

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<sup>5</sup> Kirungi, Fred. "Uganda Tackling School Bottlenecks." *Africa Recovery* vol 14.2 (2000): 20.



information and provide quotes and bids for shipping and handling, and charitable organizations and individuals could make on-line donations to finance the transport costs. This service could facilitate the provision of books not only to Uganda, but ideally to a number of other countries as well.

The limitation of this is that only those with access to a computer and the internet would be able to use such a service. It might therefore be possible to establish local contacts within the towns, who have access to the internet and could act as liaisons for schools and individuals in rural areas. As information technology becomes more widespread and the availability of internet access increases in developing countries, more and more people would be able to take advantage of this service.

While this project could potentially expand or develop into other subsidiary projects, I believe in the importance of small and humble beginnings. I also feel that an assessment must be done at each stage, in order to evaluate the project and determine whether or not it has been successful in meeting its pre-determined goals.

When I am overwhelmed by logistics and endless details, I think of the meager libraries, some containing only twenty or thirty books, which I saw during my stay in Uganda. It is truly a shame that so many valuable sources of information are simply discarded in Canada when they could be of use to people in other parts of the world who have limited access to educational resources.

## REFLECTION

Although I fully intend to do the necessary fundraising, implement my project as planned, and send the textbooks to Uganda, I realize that the entire principle behind it

raises a couple of important issues. As I have reliable contacts in Uganda who are willing to help, and logistics such as costs, transportation, and distribution seem entirely possible at this point, I'm not terribly concerned about problems that may arise in those areas; rather, I have some criticisms and concerns regarding the very premise of the project.

Firstly, I am somewhat skeptical of the relevancy of the books' contents. A number of them contained outdated and culturally insensitive material, and I took great care to ensure that all such books were removed from the boxes to be sent. The remaining books cover a variety of subjects, from biology to business to oceanography. While they may be of interest to students, I am unsure as to how practical they are and whether or not they will serve a useful purpose within the context of the existing school curriculum.

Secondly, I am critical of any form of dissemination of western knowledge and values in developing nations, whether it is through media, literature, or other mediums. I feel that everyone should have access to books, educational material, and other sources of information, and it is for this reason that I feel the books should be sent; nonetheless, sending Canadian books to Uganda is a form of western imperialism whereby "western nations transfer views and values to less developed nations".<sup>6</sup> This type of information can be detrimental if it causes feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, or discontent amongst those who receive it.

Despite my doubts and concerns, I am excited to implement this project and to see what comes of it. I truly hope that the books will be of some benefit to students in Uganda. At any rate, the entire process will give me further insight into development projects and will serve as a valuable learning experience.

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<sup>6</sup> Dunlop, Stewart. *Towards Tomorrow*. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1987.

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